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ABSTRACT

Adventure-based programs may be designed in a way that not only provides an intervention aimed at therapy or development, but also teaches participants to become their own agents of change. McWhirter's model proposes that empowerment is broader than notions of personal autonomy and efficacy, reaching outside the individual. The model specifies four requirements for complete empowerment: becoming aware of the power dynamics at work in one's life (conscientization), developing skills and capacity to gain some control over one's life, exercising this control without infringing on others' rights, and supporting empowerment of others in the community. These four requirements can give structure to an adventure program. In dealing with the primary theme of the program (specific need or intervention), participants may learn McWhirter's empowerment model experientially. Isomorphic framing techniques are used to draw parallels between the model and the primary theme's therapeutic process. To use this method, wilderness adventure programs must have two parts: preparation and training for the wilderness project and actual undertaking of the project in the wilderness. The training phase provides a wide range of life skills and meets the participants' special needs, while the wilderness phase provides motivation to learn and the opportunity to use new skills. An example of teenagers learning effective communications skills during a 2-day wilderness project illustrates the application of the four-stage empowerment model. (SV)

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It is Better to Learn to Fish: Empowerment in Adventure Education

By Ian Hyde-Hills

Adventure based therapy and training programs need to take more account of the old adage: "Give a person a fish you feed them for a day, teach them to fish, they feed themselves for a lifetime." It is better that participants on adventure therapy programs receive more than a just a cure for an unwanted behaviour or a new perspective for a confused worldview. In this day and age when the concept of self-determination is an integral part of most human endeavours it is important participants on therapeutic programs have the opportunity to learn ways of becoming their own agents of change. Because adventure programs use powerful experiential learning methods, they are able to teach participants how to overcome difficulties and heal their own lives. This paper proposes that adventure-based programs may be designed in a way that not only provides an intervention to realise the objectives set for the participant group, but also may be designed to teach them a process; a process they can apply to a wide range of areas in their lives. In contemporary therapeutic terms this is the process of empowerment.

Definitions of empowerment generally refer to persons gaining in confidence, controlling the forces that affect their lives and going out and making things in the world around them happen. The concept is underpinned with a certain amount of idealism and hope. For the purpose of adventure therapy programs the concept empowerment needs to be more precise and located within a professional training context. The fishing knowledge of the above adage can be contextualised in Western styled industrialised countries using an empowerment model proposed by McWhirter (1991). This empowerment model is comprehensive and promotes not only individual growth but also the support of others.

McWhirter's model of empowerment proposes that empowerment means more than what happens within the phenomenological world of the individual. He suggests that the notion is broader than concepts such as autonomy and efficacy. Empowerment goes outside the individual. It is a process that not only changes the individual's perception of the world but actualises change within it. McWhirter (1991) specifies four necessary requirements for complete empowerment:

> Empowerment is the process by which people, organisations, or groups who are powerless (a) become aware of the power dynamics at work in their life context

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> (b) develop the skills and capacity for gaining some reasonable control over their lives, (c) exercise this control without infringing upon the rights of others, and (d) support the empowerment of others in the community. (p. 224)

These four requirements of empowerment provide the structure for the adventure therapy program. They become the transferable themes of the program because empowerment is a universal concept and the participants can apply the process to struggles and needs they may have in other areas of their lives. Programs also have a primary theme, which is normally determined by the participants, their caregivers or a needs analysis. It is in dealing with this primary theme or group need that the participants experientially learn McWhirter's empowerment model.

Isomorphic framing techniques are used to create parallel relationships between McWhirter's empowerment model and the primary theme's (specific needs) therapeutic process. This therapeutic metaphor enables the participants to reflect on their present therapeutic process. They are able to draw parallels with this process, McWhirter's model and even other situations in their home life where they may apply the model.

The adventure program needs to have two parts when using this type of method. The first is the preparation and training for the wilderness project and the second is the actual undertaking of the project or task in the wilderness. On this type of program the participants spend approximately the same amount of time in preparation as actually doing the wilderness project. The training is more than just training for the wilderness project. The participants also learn a wide range of life skills that will make the project more fun and enjoyable. It is during training that participant's special needs are met. The proposed wilderness task provides the participants both with the motivation to learn and an opportunity to use their newly learnt skills.

To clarify the process I will illustrate McWhirter's four levels with a group of teenage participants whose specific goal is to develop communication skills. Firstly, the program operators would design a two-day wilderness project, which requires participants to have particularly effective communication skills. This motivates the participants to focus on developing these skills during the training phase of the program. Secondly, the program organisers design a training program with a more extensive communication skills component.

First Level: Awareness

"Become aware of the power dynamics at work in their life context" (McWhirter, 1991, p. 224). It is important that people have a clear understanding of the power dynamics that affect their life experience. Helping the program participants gain an awareness of these, overcoming the ones that are destructive, and developing positive ones is central to an empowerment based adventure program. This consciousness-raising aspect of McWhirter's (1991) model brings empowerment philosophy into line with Paulo Freire's (1970) concept of conscientization. This concept is relevant to adventure based programs because it fits into adventure therapy methodology of experiential learning and group processing.

Conscientization.

Conscientization as presented here is based on Paulo Freire's psychoeducational process of consciousness raising with dispossessed people in rural Brazil and Chile. For adventure therapy purposes, the dispossessed can include any group, young people, women, men, ethnic/racial groups, survivors of sexual/violent abuse, that considers itself oppressed by others, systems, or circumstances. Freire concentrates on viewing the individual, as they are in a social context - awareness of self-in-system or self-in-relation. This is somewhat different to most contemporary western teaching, which promotes self actualisation and concepts of a self embedded within systems (Ivey, Ivey & Simek-Morgan, 1997). Freire's approach involves collaboration with the dispossessed people and through a sequence of "problem-posing" dialogue guides them to a new level of awareness. A level of awareness where they become conscious of their old perspective's and come to see themselves as having options for controlling their lives and overcoming obstacles.

Getting a person to look at incongruities and contradictions that make up their assumptions, worldviews or as Freire named it "naive consciousness" is the first task of conscientization. The aim is to get dispossessed people to move blame for their condition away from themselves. As people progress through levels of reordering reality and perspective transformation they move from seeing themselves modelled on the personhood of their oppressor to themselves as a cultural being. It is when the individual begins to reflect on the self as a unique cultural being that they are led to action. Personal identity evolves from experiencing the self in relation to, rather than the self in opposition to, the oppressor. This is when the person sees self-in-system and is ready to move to action. It is at this point that the dispossessed have overcome their oppression.

The participants in our example need to understand the reasons why they do not communicate well. Are there issues in their environment that prevent them from sharing better? Do they as individuals or as a group have attitudes, beliefs, or assumptions that prevent better communications? What are other ways they can try? The participants also need to be aware that communication means listening, body language, and various levels of intimacy. The participants resolve these issues with the guidance of the facilitator and agree on a solution, which ideally includes learning skills to overcome their problems, enabling them to move onto McWhirter's second level of empowerment.

Second Level: Learning

"Develop the skills and capacity for gaining some reasonable control over their lives" (McWhirter, 1991, p. 224). This provides an experience of the second level of McWhirter's (1991) empowerment model that deals with developing skills and capacities to bring about change in one's life. After restructuring reality the need for change normally follows. Just as Freire used a variety of techniques to teach uneducated peasants to write and develop reflective awareness adventure therapy programs use a variety of techniques appropriate to western culture to bring about the same liberation of consciousness. Such things as Narrative Therapy in the form of telling stories around the campfire, Psychodrama, gaining another perspective, the "Learning Log", journal keeping and reflective writing, "I" statements, empathetic listening, turn taking, understanding and sharing feelings, and many more as is thought appropriate.

At this level our participants would learn about communication and being part of a team. Teaching takes the form of both discussion and experiential activities. Consequently the participants overcome the communication problems that would prevent them carrying out the wilderness project and learn to work better as a team. They are ready to move to level three of McWhirter's empowerment model where they will use these new skills in a real life project.

Third Level: Action

" Exercise this control without infringing upon the rights of others" (McWhirter, 1991, p. 224). This is the opportunity to operationalize the new skills and abilities the participants have learnt. Through becoming aware of their situation and learning ways to change it, the group has developed new meaning perspective. Meaning perspective's are more than a way of seeing; they are proposals to experience one's life, which involve a decision to act. Feelings and events are interpreted existentially, not just intellectually. It is in this third wave that the participants move from a cogitatively based perspective to a more behavioural one. McWhirter makes it clear that this is done without infringing on the rights of others.

Our group head off to carry out the wilderness project. The group is able to use the skills they learnt on the training section of the program and experience how improved communication skills promote the enjoyment and effectiveness of their efforts. They may also come to realise that gaining understanding is more than a cognitive (internal) process, it is also a social one (working with and sharing with others) which makes experiential learning so powerful.

Forth Level: Advocacy

"Advocate and support the empowerment of others in the community" (McWhirter, 1991, p. 224). McWhirter makes it clear that empowerment is a comprehensive process that affects more than just the individual. It must have an advocacy component that affects the individual's interactions with others, the community, and society. McWhirter makes it clear that until the person becoming empowered does this, true empowerment has not taken place. The participants are required to support and encourage each other on the remainder of the project. This often requires participants developing conflict resolution and empathy skills. The facilitator also invites the participants to advocate for and support all other groups and individuals in struggles against oppression.

McWhirter's model adds the following dimension to adventure programs. Firstly, it helps the group identify the power dynamics, systemic processes, and societal forces at work in their lives. It is important that people realise societal forces do cause people to fail (Sue, 1981) but just as important that these people accept responsibility to change these forces. Secondly, people need to develop skills in their lives because it gives them a greater range of control over their lives. Programs are designed to use the participant's strengths and abilities where possible and act to weave positive meaning and hope from these (Waldegrave, 1991). Thirdly, it gets the participants to operationalize what they have learnt by designing tasks and activities that require their newly learnt skills. Finally, the model encourages the participants to advocate for and support others who are struggling against oppression and personal difficulties.

In summary empowerment is an ongoing process that is simultaneously evolving in the individual and the individual's community. Like a wave of symbiotic energy it flows from person to person. It presents a developmental cycle where the individual being supported by another becomes empowered, overcomes personal and socially imposed difficulties, returns to his/her community and advocates for and supports others in their quest for empowerment. Cognition, behaviour and other people seem necessary for empowerment to be complete.

Conclusion

I will briefly summarise what I have been attempting to say. The most valuable part of any program is the part that shows the participant how to be his/her own healer, the part that provides understanding of the therapeutic process. It seems reasonable to suggest that all programs should have at least two themes. A primary theme, which is aimed at providing therapeutic relief for, targeted conditions. This may be considered the intervention and would result from a needs analysis or the participant's request. The secondary theme is an empowerment model, which enables the participant to personally bring about change in their life. The first theme provides an experiential learning opportunity for the second theme.

I introduced McWhirter's (1991) empowerment model as a suitable framework for providing the secondary theme in adventure based therapy programs. Although comprehensive this is a relatively simple model and should be able to be used by most participants. Using the empowerment model in the way proposed by this essay is especially attractive, because ultimately the aim of all good therapists is to work toward their own redundancy. As McWhirter (1991) points out, it is through this relationship of being empowered and supporting the process of empowerment in others that true power comes.

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